



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

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### **VicForests hits Australian Forestry Standard target**

VicForests, the State-owned company responsible for the harvesting and sale of native forest timber from State forests in eastern Victoria, has achieved Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) certification.

VicForests' CEO, Mr David Pollard, said that achieving certification was a great step forward for VicForests and for the sustainable management of Victoria's State forests.

"Being certified means that an independent third-party auditor has assessed VicForests' forest management system and that all of the requirements of the AFS have been met," Mr Pollard said.

"The AFS requires that all forest management activities, from preparation through to harvesting, haulage and regeneration are properly planned, properly conducted, monitored and reviewed.

"To achieve the standard, VicForests has reviewed and improved its procedures and practices and engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders. This included procedural amendment and improvement that involved staff in all locations and at all levels of the organisation."

Mr Greg McCormack, Managing Director of McCormack Timbers said that the achievement of AFS certification was a positive step both for VicForests and the Victorian timber industry.

"Consumers of forest products are increasingly concerned about the sustainability of sources where wood is harvested. Recognition of the sustainability of harvesting carried out by VicForests is most welcome," Mr McCormack said.

"The compliance with the Australian Forest Standard awarded to VicForests by independent auditors will ensure that wood supplied to processors will have ready access to domestic and international markets."

The evaluation of VicForests for certification included assessments of paper-based procedures, as well as on-ground field audits. VicForests will be subject to follow-up assessments on a six-monthly basis, beginning in June 2007. VicForests is also committed to pursuing certification to the Forest Stewardship Council.

VicForests is Australia's twelfth forest grower to be certified to the AFS.

**ENDS**

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## **Media Backgrounder**

### **VicForests**

VicForests is a State-owned enterprise responsible for the harvest and haulage of timber from State forests throughout eastern Victoria. It returns the income from the sale of this timber to Treasury and works closely with the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries. Its role includes the management of harvest and haulage contractors, sale of timber and the regeneration of harvested coupes.

### **What is the AFS?**

The Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) is a nationally endorsed Interim Australian Standard developed for Australian use, but using the international framework of the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators and the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 14000 series of international, voluntary environmental management standards.

The AFS is recognised internationally through its endorsement by the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) schemes. The PEFC has approximately 200 million hectares certified across 20 countries.

More information on the standard is available at the website <http://www.forestrystandard.org.au>

### **Why certify?**

VicForests committed to the pursuit of certification to assist customers in retaining their existing markets and to demonstrate publicly that its operations are conducted on a sustainable basis.

Certification provides for a more systematic approach to operational activities and provides a framework for continual improvement.

The nine AFS criteria are:

- Environmental Management System (EMS - ISO14001)
- Public participation and good neighbour
- Protect biodiversity
- Maintain forest productivity
- Maintain forest health and vitality
- Protect soil and water
- Maintain carbon cycles
- Protect Indigenous and cultural values
- Maintain social and economic benefits

### **What is involved?**

VicForests committed to pursuit of AFS certification in late 2004. The process began with a gap analysis in early 2005, followed by two pre-certification audits. The final audit was conducted in December 2006.

### **Maintaining the standard**

VicForests is committed to a system of continuous improvement.

To retain the AFS certification, VicForests will be subject to follow-up assessments on a six-monthly basis, beginning in June 2007.

VicForests is also committed to pursuing certification by the Forest Stewardship Council.

VicForests operations are also subject to annual environmental audits by the EPA. It also conducts frequent internal audits of its processes.

VicForests will release its first sustainability report in late 2007.